

Pracademics: The Intersection of Teaching and Research



Teacher research usually begins in the classroom and emerges from teaching practices. Borg (2009, 2013) defines teacher research as research that practitioners do systematically in their own contexts to explore and better understand their teaching practices. Teacher research based on real teachers' experiences adds valuable insights to education and bridges gaps within the language teaching field. However, there is still an ongoing debate in education between teachers in the classroom (practitioners) and academic researchers (academia). The latter group often argues that there is a lack of scientific and empirical perspectives in teacher research, while the first group often believes that the field lacks a practical understanding of teaching. Despite this, an increasing number of teachers are developing research activities. Their reasons for their research

Key Findings

1.

An increasing number of teachers are developing research activities. Their reasons may vary due to personal, career, and academic interests, among others.

2.

Posner (2009) states that pracademics foster the creation of networks and facilitate collaborations between industries and universities, benefiting members of both worlds.

3.

Engaging in pracademics allows practitioners to intentionally promote social justice by purposefully highlighting linguistic diversity. By seeking to understand students' backgrounds and the richness of their linguistic repertoires, multilingual learners and their families are supported through a more integrated approach.

may vary due to personal, career, and academic interests, among others. This is how the concept of **pracademics**, which emerged from a multidisciplinary context and recently expanded to the educational field, was born.

Teachers—or classroom-level practitioners—who engage in research are called pracademics. Posner (2009) defines pracademics as those who “occupy significant positions as both academics and practitioners” (p. 16). Wolfenden et al. (2019) refer to pracademics as “practice academics” who benefit from a blend of diverse knowledge and abilities. Pracademics often find themselves as members of different communities; each one with its own culture, and therefore, its own demands. This can entail navigating new identities, skills, and abilities, and even new roles as practitioners, writers, scholars, and researchers. These transitions usually create taxing demands on teachers. Hollweck et al. (2021) affirm that pracademics endure steep processes of finding their identity, community, and areas of engagement; hence, moving between roles (classroom teacher to researcher, and vice versa) becomes challenging but necessary to better support students’ teaching and learning.

Posner (2009) states that pracademics foster the creation of networks and facilitate collaborations between industries and universities, benefiting members of both worlds. This claim is backed contextually around the globe through institutions (in Europe and Asia in particular) that provide safe spaces for teachers to exercise their pracademic role and offer them the necessary opportunities and access to resources and time. In Africa, for example, teacher members of the [Africa English Language Teacher Association](#) engage in exploratory action research. In addition, the association focuses on supporting research from teachers in remote, multilingual classrooms across the continent. The association has focused especially on areas where resources are scarce and opportunities limited (Africa ELTA, 2019).

While there are no well-documented cases in Latin America, we see that in regions like Central America *pracademia* is beginning to develop and usually occurs within the realm of a methods course at the postgraduate level, where information shared in the classroom has yet to transcend the walls of the institution. In Mexico, for example, teachers may opt for an academic, research-heavy path—especially in postgraduate programs. Teachers become role models for their students, while also becoming researchers that aspire to full-time positions within institutions of higher education. Additionally, South America is seeing an increasing number of pracademics who can link their practitioner role with their academic role as they successfully navigate both worlds.

Finally, in the United States, the [Multilingual Learning Research Center](#) contributes to advancing multilingual learners’ outcomes domestically and internationally through collaborative action research with hundreds of teachers worldwide. WIDA, through WIDA Español, has also begun exploring pracademics. First, by establishing background knowledge through an initial [snapshot on action research](#). Next, through this Research Brief introducing pracademics, which will serve as the foundation for future publications by WIDA on this topic.

The field is moving quickly in the direction of pracademics; however, what do these efforts, research spaces, and achievements by teachers mean to educators of multilingual learners? It opens a wide range of possibilities, since

- it implies the potential of a future where multilingual teachers have autonomy over their own explorations, leading to contextualized solutions
- it means having immediate access to the data, allowing educators to design tailored approaches to support their learners
- it places educator voices and the needs of their students on researchers' and other practitioners' radars, moving beyond the scholarly platform and into the world of practice

By addressing the intersection of practice and academia, teachers are encouraged to be more involved in implementing evidence-based approaches and becoming more familiar with the research informing their classroom practice directly. Engaging in pracademics also allows practitioners to intentionally promote social justice by purposefully highlighting linguistic diversity. By seeking to understand students' backgrounds and the richness of their linguistic repertoires, multilingual learners and their families are supported through a more integrated approach.

Considering that pracademics bridges practice and research, influences policy, and caters to the needs of multilingual learners, here are some of the next steps that institutions could take to foster and facilitate teachers' practitioner and researcher roles:

- Provide the necessary space, time, and resources for teachers interested in research.
- Facilitate teachers' attendance at professional learning events to build their skills to become researchers, writers, and presenters who can share their findings.
- Recognize teachers' contributions to the field and their efforts to support learners.

By recognizing and elevating opportunities for future pracademics, we will enrich the field of teaching and learning and gain many new insights into the work of multilingual educators.

About the authors

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